

I am very grateful for the work that I do because it involves helping people deal with the many events and circumstances that effect their lives. Many children, youth and families would fall through the cracks without organizations like the Family Resource Association and other helping organizations that operate in most communities. One of the most consistent issues that we deal with is trauma. Sometimes we are involved while the trauma is occurring and at other times we are called upon to address the residual effects of trauma as individuals try to cope with their experiences.

Trauma can be psychological, emotional and/or physical. An individual can be traumatized from a single event or from long term repetitive damage to the psyche. One of the most debilitating effects of trauma is the reliving of traumatic memories. There are a number of events that can cause trauma but primarily it is an assault that overloads our ability to maintain a balanced response to life. For example, the death of a significant other can cause such shock and grief that an individual becomes completely overwhelmed. This feeling of being out of control can cause a string of symptoms that will compound the effects of the traumatic event. Sleep and eating patterns are affected. Individuals feel anxious and isolated. They may become confused or feel light headed and off balance. They are susceptible to illnesses and they may become depressed.

We know that sexual abuse, abandonment, neglect, psychological abuse, domestic violence and children witnessing violence, as well as physical attacks and bullying are common ways in which children and adults are traumatized. It can also happen to people who experience near death events such as a plane or car crash. Lately we have had a front row seat via the media to major natural disasters such as tsunami and earthquakes. Most of the people that we see milling around the streets after the big event are experiencing trauma. They are in shock and many are disoriented.

One of the interesting things about trauma is that not everyone reacts to an event in the same way so it is possible for one person to experience a situation that is completely traumatizing while another person, even a sibling, is not affected by the same experience.

Research seems to be clear that childhood trauma can lead to violent behaviour. There is no doubt that lives can be ruined by untreated trauma which seems to be insidious in its constant underlying influence over a lifetime. The good news is that trauma can be treated quite effectively through counselling and individuals can learn to move forward.

Next week the Family Resource Association, in partnership with the Mary Manning Centre in Victoria, is hosting a two day conference on complex trauma. The speakers are Dr. Martin Brokenleg, who has gained international attention for his revolutionary ideas about working with children and youth, and Yvonne Haist, who will speak on the neuroscience of trauma. Please contact FRA or go to our website: www.d69fra.org if you are interested in attending this event.

Deborah Joyce is the Executive Director of District 69 Family Resource Association serving children, youth and families in Oceanside. Contact her at 250 752 6766.